Testimony of

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before the

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Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure
Subcommittee on Aviation

Status of the Air Traffic Controller Workforce

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Introduction

Good morning Chairman Mica, Congressman DeFazio, and members of the Subcommittee. I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the staffing shortage facing our air traffic control system. I am Ruth Marlin, ExecutiveVice President of the National Air Traffic Controllers Association.

We're here today because we all recognize that our air traffic control system, the safest and most efficient in the world, is facing a staffing shortage of crisis proportions in the coming years. The overarching solution to this crisis is the hiring and training of thousands of new controllers. There is no other way around this problem. The consequences of inaction are dire. Without adequate numbers of certified controllers we cannot increase system capacity and safely meet the needs of our nation's travelers – instead we will see increasing delays and operational errors. But the controller shortage affects more than the day-to-day operation of the system – it jeopardizes the future of the system and America's leadership role in world aviation. We simply will not have the resources available to modernize equipment, redesign airspace and update our standards.

There has been a great deal of discussion about the need to plan more precisely in the hiring, training and placement of new controllers in the system, and I agree this is important. However, we cannot delay hiring while these plans are developed. We need to move forward to bring new controllers into the system, allowing us to fill known vacancies while we develop better plans to identify future vacancies. NATCA is eager to assist the agency in refining the process. We have a great deal of experience in the field, as the majority of any controller's training is performed by NATCA bargaining unit members. Our expertise and experience is essential if the FAA is going to improve the controller training process, and we are happy to provide it. But the problem cannot wait. It gets worse every month as we fall further behind. And with the delay, the solution becomes more difficult and more costly to implement.

We need Congress to provide the funding to allow the FAA to hire 1,000 additional controllers. This is not a problem we can simply push off to another year, because there is limited capacity to train controllers in the system. Delaying the solution makes the problem exponentially worse. We can no longer wait. For many locations, we have waited too long already. Congress needs to act now.

About NATCA

NATCA is proud to represent over 15,000 air traffic controllers serving the FAA, Department of Defense and private sector. But NATCA is not a single profession union -- aviation safety depends on the expertise of many different kinds of professionals. NATCA represents approximately 1,200 FAA engineers, over 600 traffic management coordinators, and thousands of federal employees working as automation specialists, support specialists in field facilities and regional personnel from FAA's logistics, budget,

finance and computer specialist divisions, and agency occupational health specialists, nurses and medical program specialists.

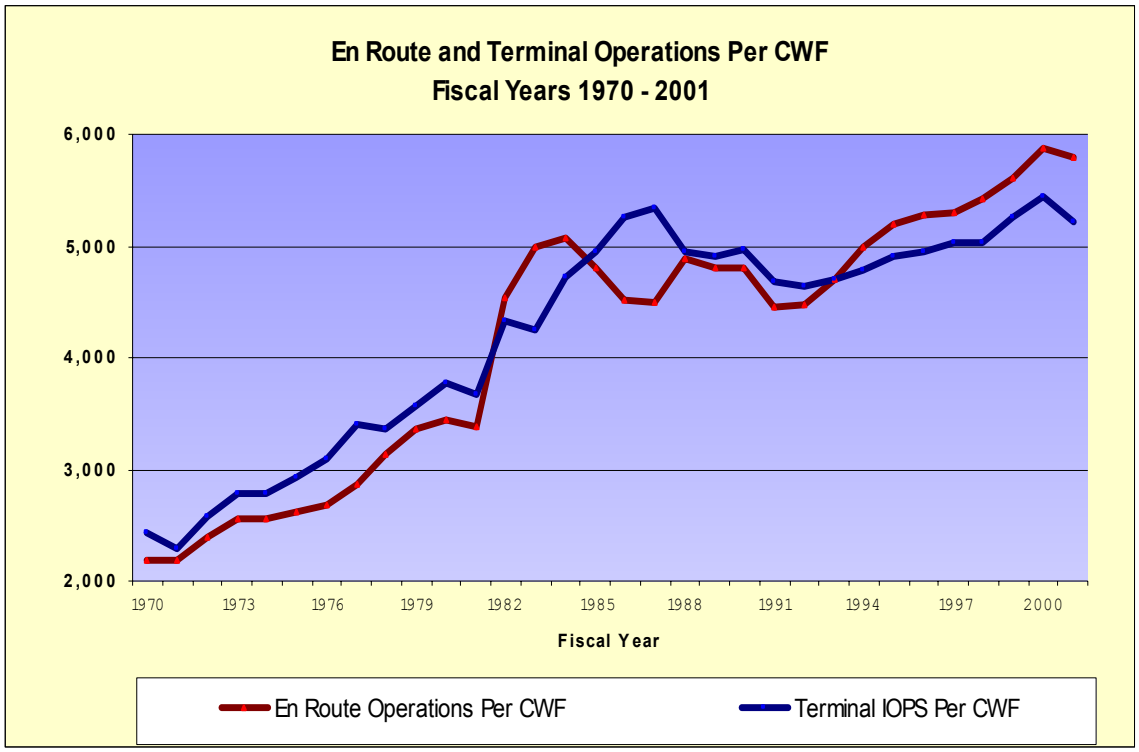
NATCA members are committed to ensuring the high performance operation of the vast network of sophisticated air traffic control, navigation, surveillance, communication, and automation equipment that makes up the National Airspace System. Safety is what we do – it is our sacred trust. Aviation safety is quite simply the litmus test against which all of our actions should be measured. And no single issue threatens the continued safety of our air traffic control system more than the staffing shortage in front of us. Unless the Federal Aviation Administration and Congress address this crisis now, we risk compromising the safest, most efficient air traffic control system in the world.

Moreover, we risk abandoning our nation's well-earned leadership role in aviation. We are a model that the rest of the world strives to attain. While we see opportunities to improve and often criticize our system, the rest of the world sees our system as a goal. I have spoken with controllers and executives from around the world and they look to the United States with admiration. Australia is trying to emulate our airspace, Europe wants to achieve our efficiencies, and Argentina would benefit by modeling our infrastructure. Everyday I am reminded how proud I am to be part of the world's finest air traffic control system. Everyday I am proud of my country for leading the world in air traffic control.

Efficiency and Productivity

As every member on this distinguished panel knows, our air traffic control system is the safest, most efficient system in the world. But what you may not know is that our controllers are also the most productive. According to a recent study by EUROCONTROL, American air traffic controllers are 79% more productive than their European counterparts. Support costs are 57% lower, and while individual employment costs in the U.S. are slightly higher than in Europe, our longer working hours mean that the hour for hour costs are comparable. We work longer hours, more days per month and take fewer days off each year and work more airplanes at a time than our European counterparts. What these figures mean is that the American air traffic control system is far more cost effective than its European counterpart. The overall indicator of cost effectiveness is average costs per flight hour; and according to Eurocontrol's own report, their costs were 74% higher than in the U.S. This is a record to be proud of.

It is a testament to the men and women I represent that our system is the best. And we have been able to maintain this gold standard of excellence even as our workload has skyrocketed. The following chart depicts the changes in operations per controller workforce employee from 1970 to 2001. En route operations per controller workforce employee increased by 165% and terminal instrument operations increased by 115%. This is a real increase in controller productivity compared with only a 69% real increase in operational costs. This is even more striking when the non-personnel costs covered by operation dollars is considered.



The increase in controller workloads can only be expected to continue in the years ahead, as the FAA embarks on an ambitious plan to enhance system capacity and air traffic continues to climb, this summer projected to surpass pre-September 11th levels. Secretary of Transportation Mineta recently established the goal of increasing flight capacity threefold before the end of the decade. To reach this goal and retain the safety standards that are the hallmark of our system, the FAA must begin hiring thousands of controllers to replace the thousands who are expected to retire in the years ahead.

While safety is the responsibility of all participants in the nation's air transportation system, the FAA's air traffic controller workforce serves on the front line, separating thousands of commercial, military and general aviation aircraft operations on a daily basis. The more than 15,000 professional air traffic controllers are essential to the seamless, safe, and efficient movement of these aircraft at airports, terminal radar approach control (TRACON)s and enroute centers. It should be an absolute priority of the FAA to ensure that there are enough qualified and fully trained air traffic controllers to handle the increased traffic growth, the opening of new sectors and runways, and to prepare for the impending retirement crunch.

Scope of the Problem

The General Accounting Office has painted an extremely bleak picture of the future of air traffic control if the staffing shortage challenge is not addressed. Using its own controller attrition simulation model, GAO projects that nearly 7,500 controllers will leave the workforce between 2002 and 2011 – that's 50% of the current total number of controllers. At the 10 busiest airports, the study projects that 74% of current controllers will retire within the next 8 years. What this means for the system as a whole is more delays and possible safety risks, according to the GAO.

For the traveler, the math is simple - fewer controllers equal more delayed flights. In order to safely accommodate the traffic in a short-staffed system, the traffic will have to be "flowed." That is air traffic management lingo for restricting capacity – which causes delays and cancellations. This is not speculation, this is already happening everyday. While the documentation may not say "staffing delay," the controllers working the system know the problem. For example, in Chicago Center, they log "volume delays" because the volume of traffic exceeds the amount the existing staffing can handle. In Miami Center, more traffic could be accommodated if certain sectors were divided into two sectors, but they lack the staffing to implement any of these plans. You cannot open a new sector if you don't have any controllers to work the scope.

In order to manage the current staffing shortages, we continue to see high rates of mandatory overtime leading to lower morale and even more rapid rates of retirement. NATCA surveys have shown that increased mandatory overtime causes people to retire even earlier than planned. Unfortunately, we have already seen that happening. Controller morale continues to decline partly because there is no relief in sight.

The GAO report concludes that, so far, the FAA has not done enough to adequately plan for the coming staffing crisis and must do so as soon as possible. Specifically, it stated, "Ultimately, FAA's ability to successfully plan for and manage this situation will dictate its overall impact on the nation's air traffic control system and the safety and efficiency of air travel in the United States." But the FAA's planning isn't enough; they need the resources to meet their mandate.

The Department of Transportation's own Inspector General echoes these findings. On March 17, 2004, Inspector General Ken Mead testified that the FAA is so far not adequately prepared to handle the impending staffing crisis. He stated that,

> *"Accurate cost and workforce data are particularly critical in light of the anticipated wave of controller retirements. FAA currently estimates that about 7,000 controllers could leave the agency over the next decade. Whether the FAA will need to replace all of them on a one-for-one basis depends on many factors, including future air traffic levels, new technologies, and initiatives that FAA undertakes in its hiring and training process."*

The Inspector General went on in his testimony to outline three critical questions the FAA needs to answer in order to get a grip on the problem: 1) When the retirements will occur, 2) Where the vacancies will occur, and 3) What the costs and time period for on-the-job training will be. The IG concluded that the FAA has failed to address these and other questions yet.

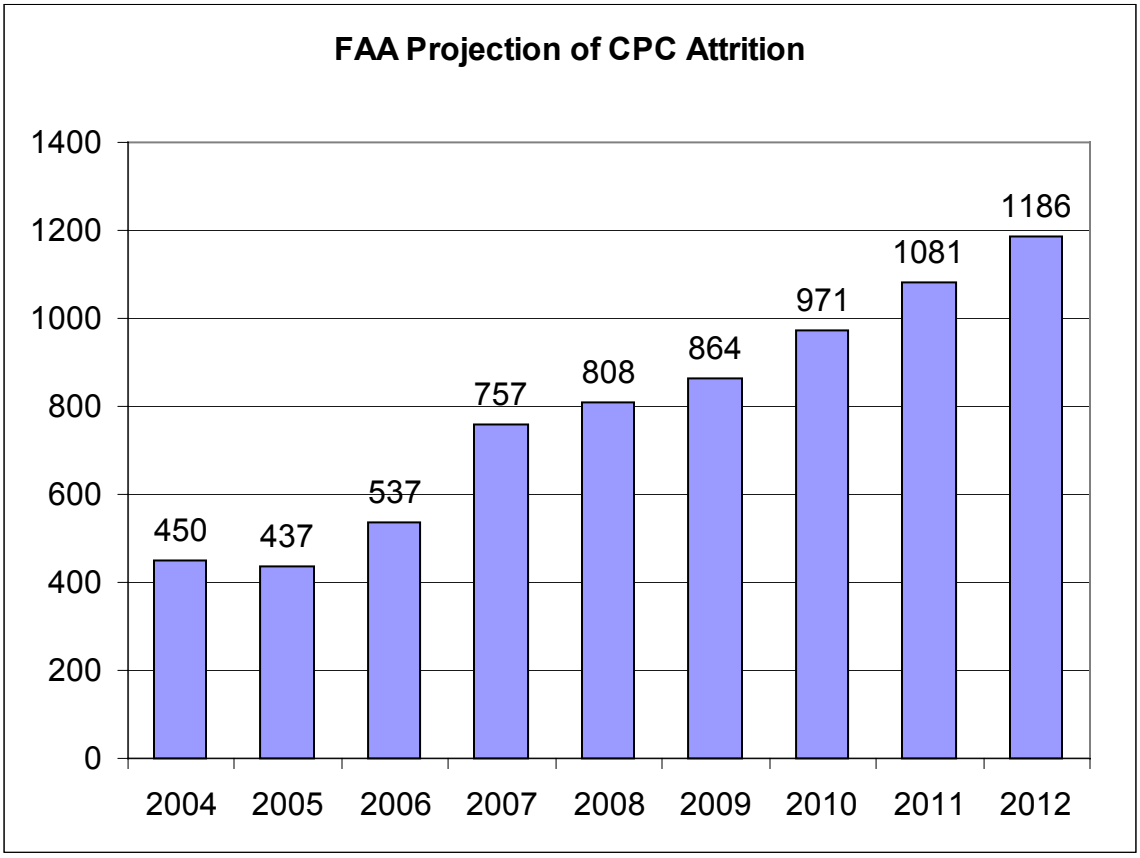
The thousands of controllers hired during the post-PATCO recovery period are reaching retirement eligibility. Based on FAA data, we will be facing up to a 50% shortage in the next ten years. FAA Administrator Marion Blakey acknowledged in recent testimony that the coming shortage of controllers will reach "tsunami" proportions. Our window of opportunity to prevent that tsunami from becoming a catastrophe is rapidly closing. Unfortunately, retirement is not the only reason why controllers vacate operations positions. The congressional mandate to increase the number of supervisors depletes the controller workforce even further and increases the demands on our training capacity. Supervisors are not hired from outside the FAA, you must be a Certified Professional Controller to qualify for the job. Additionally, each year operational controllers move to other positions in the FAA and each one increases our need to hire additional controllers.

This problem is not sudden or unexpected. It is known and we have had advance warning. Whether or not we address the problem and prevent our aviation infrastructure from collapsing under its own weight is a choice. You have the opportunity to make that choice. Either we will continue to be a world leader in aviation, or we will not. Either we will continue to have the safest and most efficient system in the world, or we will not. My members will continue to do everything possible to keep our collective heads above water, but it is Congress and the administration that can send us a lifeboat.

Everyone has acknowledged the problem. We can do yet another round of studies and reports but the answer is plainly in front of all of us. The FAA must immediately begin hiring and training the next generation of air traffic controllers to prepare for the inevitable shortage. And Congress must provide the FAA with resources to do so. Delays will not suffice anymore, waiting until a fully qualified controller retires to begin training his replacement is simply too late. Unless enough new controllers are hired now, we will be left with a system that is woefully understaffed and simply unable to accommodate the demands for air transportation.

In the FAA's projection, 450 controllers will retire this year, 437 in 2005, 537 in 2006, and 757 in 2007 – a total of 2,181 in the next three years. Even under the most conservative estimates it takes 3.1 years to train a controller to the full performance level where they can work independently as a certified professional controller. At a one for one rate of replacement, the FAA will hire only 887 controllers in 2004 and 2005, assuming all of them qualify in minimum time, we will still be nearly 1,300 controllers short even as more and more begin to leave the system. By FAA's estimates, the numbers of controllers leaving in any single year continues to accelerate, soon exceeding 1,000. As the problem accelerates, our ability to fix it is diminished because there is a limit to the number of controllers who can be in trained in any given year and most of the

controllers retiring are also experienced instructors. So each year we are faced with fewer instructors and more trainees.



Real Solutions

What we need is action, now. NATCA is prepared to work with the FAA and Congress to address this crisis before it becomes insurmountable. We have identified real solutions that can make a real difference. However, we all need to recognize that the first and most important priority is to provide funding to hire more controllers.

The President's FY2005 budget request provides no funding for the hiring of additional new controllers. If we defer this problem for just one year, the need balloons from 2,181 to nearly 3,000 in 2006. And since those controllers remain in training for several years, we will quickly see over one third of the workforce in training, another third providing that training and we will be simply unable to operate the system at maximum efficiency. Three years ago we were talking about gridlock and while we have had a brief respite from that, the respite is over. I said it then and it is just as true now, a system headed for gridlock, staffed with trainees is a recipe for disaster. We have to get ahead of the problem so we can stay ahead.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, we have asked for additional funding for new controllers in the FY 2005 Transportation, Treasury and Independent Agencies Appropriations Bill. We are well aware of the federal government's fiscal limitations and know the staffing problem cannot be solved in one year. We also know that as the nation tries to recover economically, now is not the time to cripple our air transportation system. Our airlines are finally coming back. There are new start-ups reinvigorating the industry, and after three very tough years of bankruptcies and bailouts, there seems to be light on the horizon. We must ensure that air traffic continues to be safe, orderly and expeditious. That is our mandate.

There are other corollary steps we can take to pave the way for the addition of thousands of new trainees into an already delicate system. We need to make room for these trainees at lower-volume facilities by transferring experienced controllers to higher-volume facilities. With the prospect of thousands of new controllers entering the system, all of whom require intensive on-the-job training, it makes sense to begin preparations to accommodate them now. And it makes even more sense to make space at facilities that have the capacity to handle them.

We can do that today. We have hundreds of controllers with active bids to higher-level facilities. These are locations that have identified vacancies. They are not anticipating a shortage, they already have one. As we are all aware, the vast majority of moves for air traffic controllers do not include Permanent Change of Station (PCS) funds. In fact, according to the October 2002 GAO report to this committee, only 16% of moves involve a promotion and only 6% of lateral moves involve any PCS funds whatsoever.

As the Inspector General illustrates in the most recent report on controllers training, controllers transferring from other FAA facilities certify in half the time needed to certify trainees from other sources. This is the single most tangible and verifiable way to reduce the time and cost associated with on-the-job training – one of the major issues identified in the Inspector General's report issued on June 2, 2004.

There are also minor policy changes that can be adopted to avoid making the problem worse. One constructive step is for the FAA to stop terminating, removing, transferring or reassigning any air traffic control specialist *solely* because the agency erred in hiring that individual after he or she reached the maximum entry age of 31. This has happened on occasion when the FAA hired a controller under the age of 36 (above which no waivers are permitted) who had been granted an age waiver by the Department of Defense, then later determined that the FAA would not recognize the DOD waiver. Why remove capable, fully-trained workers based on a technicality when we are facing a severe staffing shortage? The current rules covering FAA and DOD age waivers are unclear and we have asked that the language above be adopted into law.

Another positive step is to increase the length of time a graduate from one of the FAA identified Collegiate Training Initiative schools can remain eligible for hire as a

controller. Under earlier hiring source efforts, prospective employees, once eligible, remained eligible as long as they were under the maximum age for hire. Under the current CTI program, eligibily expires after two years. I believe the Administrator is currently working to address this problem and I applaud her willingness to examine this issue.

In addition, the Congress has mandated an increase in the number of supervisors. We must ensure that these supervisors are used in operational positions covering the watch schedule and not put on administrative schedules while Controllers-in-Charge are pulled from the schedule during long periods of watch coverage, particularly on nights and weekends. While the Controller-in-Charge program has been very effective, in too many locations it has been used to reduce available controller staffing.

Finally, we are very concerned that this Committee has inadvertently created an incentive for controllers to leave operational positions by extending early retirement benefits to second level managers that, unlike controllers, traffic management coordinators, and first line supervisors, are not subject to a mandatory retirement age. The primary incentive for controllers to remain in this high stress environment for 20 years is to reach eligibility under the controller retirement provisions of both CSRS and FERS. Without this incentive, we increase the likelihood that experienced controllers will leave operational positions. At the time when we should be most focused on retaining those experienced controllers, rather than create incentives, like extending the increased annuity to all years of active ATC service rather than ending it after 20 years, we have created a disincentive that is even opposed by the Office of Personnel Management.

NATCA and the FAA share a proud tradition of working together to reach common ground, especially when our air transportation system's safety is at stake. An excellent example of this cooperation is the agreement we signed that called for air traffic controllers on the front lines to be involved in modernization programs administered by the FAA from the "drawing board" through to final implementation. In the past five years, controllers and the FAA, working together, have installed and integrated into the air traffic control system 7,100 major systems and pieces of equipment, as well as more than 10,000 hardware and software upgrades. As a result, delays due to equipment were down 70% in 2002. There are several other initiatives we have undertaken in partnership with the FAA:

- The Choke Point Initiative has reduced delays by 20%
- Air Traffic Controllers agreed to use their break times to perform air safety functions, which saved taxpayers $28 million in 2002 alone.
- The "Controller in Charge" program, in which controllers voluntarily take on certain supervisory duties, saved taxpayers more than $27 million over three years.

These successes are not limited to national programs. In facilities where local managers are willing to work with the local union, we have seen tremendous successes. For

example, FAA facility management and NATCA members in Newark teamed up to implement a new system that reduced delays on one runway by 42%. Considering this airport once made front-page news as the most delayed airport in the country, this is no small feat. In Cleveland Center, which for many years topped the chart of facilities with the most operational errors, working together to implement and staff choke point sectors reduced operational errors 37% in the first year of the program. We are proud to be part of these and hundreds of other successes that come from a constructive working relationship and the willingness to focus on common goals.

These are just some of the many ways NATCA and the FAA have been able to improve efficiency and save money. Now is the time to team up to confront one of the biggest challenges we've faced yet – the air traffic controller staffing shortage. NATCA supports the FAA's attempts to modernize the system and make the work controllers do more productive with the introduction of new equipment. This single effort, however, will not curb the need to hire thousands of new controllers in the coming years and, in fact, the staffing shortage might make it impossible to implement new technologies.

The situation at the Anchorage Center illustrates the point. At current staffing levels, the FAA is struggling to get the ATOP program underway because the training required to teach the new system requires controllers to be in the classroom rather than the control room. With seven new employees, the program can only be implemented as long as everyone works six-day work weeks. This arrangement will cost $1 million in overtime pay. The fact is there is a better short and long-term solution – 12 new employees can be hired, as Anchorage management has requested, and the training can be completed with minimal overtime and impact on the workforce. Through guaranteed attrition—retirements and transfers—in the coming years the 12 new employees will be absorbed in only two years. This plan delivers dual benefits as it allows us to address both the training needs for ATOP and prepare for coming retirements.

Examples of the Staffing Crisis Around the Country

The statistics, as revealing as they are, do not tell the full story. The following are just a few of the real-life examples of staffing shortages currently occurring across the country:

- Los Angeles Center (ZLA) is authorized 309 controllers but has only 276 on board; of that number only 219 are fully qualified. It expects the number to drop to 206 by 2005 and even further if supervisor retirements are backfilled by promoting operational controllers.
- Las Vegas Tracon, the 18th busiest in the country with over 600,000 operations a year, is authorized 56 controllers but has only 34 fully qualified controllers – three controllers have already retired this year and a fourth is pending.
- Newark Tower requires 40 controllers under the FAA staffing standard, yet it has only 29 fully certified controllers. Of these, six are eligible to retire in the next five years.

The current controller workforce is stretched to the limit and we cannot call up the reserves. There are no reserves. The situation at the Chicago TRACON illustrates the problems that lie ahead. For six years, the number of full performance level controllers has declined steadily as retirements have increased. The TRACON is authorized to have 101 controllers, and it currently has 101 working. The catch is that only 73 of these are fully certified, with the rest in intensive training. Not only is the facility short-staffed, but a significant portion of the 73 certified controllers spend their time providing on-the-job instruction for trainees.

Of the current workforce, 20 controllers are eligible to retire right now and 17 more are eligible in the next three years. Managers in Chicago have relied heavily on overtime to keep traffic flowing in one of the nation's busiest hubs. On May 26, 2003, controllers began working regularly scheduled six-day weeks during the summer months. Operational errors are up, and morale is down.

This is a disturbingly accurate picture of what awaits the entire air traffic control system if the staffing shortage crisis is not adequately addressed. Efficient, productive controllers doing their best, as they are overworked in understaffed towers and centers, is admirable but ultimately unsustainable and dangerous.

Contrast the dismal situation in Chicago with what happened in Cleveland when more controllers were hired. When the Cleveland Air Route Traffic Control Center—the world's busiest facility—was plagued by complex and congested airspace, in implementing new choke points sectors the FAA gave the center a modest 7% staffing increase to alleviate the problem. The result was a 38% reduction in operational errors. More controllers and greater resources translate into positive results for the air traffic control system.

Initiatives, But Not Solutions

We have had no shortage of ideas to address the problem by doing anything but the obvious, hire more controllers. At the end of the day, there is no panacea, no magic bullet to make the problem in front of all of us disappear.

Raising the Retirement Age

Congress has directed the FAA to allow age waivers to let controllers work beyond the mandatory retirement age. This is an area in which we should exercise extreme caution. And while that might seem like a possible solution, we remind you of the video tape that you just viewed of what air traffic controllers experience each and every day. I am an air traffic controller, and it is a job that I love - as do the overwhelming majority of my colleagues. In order to survive the every day stress and demand, you would have to love it.

But love doesn't guarantee safety. Another complicating factor is that even if the retirement age was increased, our research indicates that only a small percentage of

controllers would seek the waivers and those controllers would only work a maximum of five additional years. Prolonging the inevitable is simply not a solution for ensuring that we have enough controllers looking out for safety in our skies.

Time On Position

I would also like to take a moment to address the issue of controller time on position. This is a measure of time that controllers are working with the primary responsibility for an operational air traffic control position. It is only a portion of the controller's job functions and does not include receiving position relief briefings, mandatory recurrent training, debriefing trainees, and performing other FAA assigned duties. Using this as a sole measure of controller productivity is akin to determining the productivity of a member of Congress by measuring time spent on the House floor. It simply is not an accurate measure.

We all know that this is not an accurate measure but since it is the only time measured and available for any FAA employee, it has a great deal of visibility and has taken on a disproportionate importance in the policy debate. Some have suggested that one way to deal with the staffing shortage is to increase daily time on position. If safety is the paramount concern in every decision that the FAA makes, as it should be, then this "solution" is not only counterintuitive, but a recipe for disaster. To understand why, one need look no further than the FAA's own regulations on pilot hours worked. The law says that pilots who work for an airline cannot fly more than 100 hours per month or more than 1,000 hours per year. Even though flying does not involve much hard physical work, pilots can feel a lot of stress because they are responsible for the safety of their passengers. They must be vigilant and constantly prepared to react quickly if something goes wrong. The same is true for air traffic controllers.

As the video showed, each controller is responsible for many planes at once and has to be constantly focused on the task at hand. There's a reason for that time off during a controller's day. Safety. How many members of this panel would feel comfortable flying through airspace controlled by someone who had worked for many more straight hours at a time than they currently do? As one controller put it recently, "the best way to increase the number of operational errors on the job is to extend the number of hours in a row we work."

NATCA has not pushed for regulatory limits on working hours like the FAA has issued for pilots, or like those that exist for controller in other countries, because we have always been able to work the scheduling issues in a constructive way through collective bargaining. We are proud of the fact that we can allow the agency the maximum flexibility to manage peak and unexpected traffic levels, without excessive regulatory constraints. We are proud to be part of the team and help make it through the truly difficult periods. But failure to address the staffing shortage is not a difficult period; it is a systemic failure. Our ability to work through it is diminished when there is no relief in sight. Controller fatigue can seriously diminish the safety of our skies.

Sick Leave

A similar flawed line of reasoning questions why air traffic controllers use more sick leave than average federal employees. There are simple answers to this question that strongly suggest how flawed an aggressive effort at scaling back sick leave time would be in dealing with the staffing shortage. Controllers have a higher medical standard than other federal employees. We have seen an increase in medical disqualifications issued by FAA flight surgeons, and NATCA has contracted with independent medical experts to help controllers retain their medical certificates.

In addition to stringent medical qualifications, most over the counter cold and flu medications cannot be taken before or while performing controller duties. Unlike most FAA or other government employees, controllers do not have an individually assigned workspace or computer. Keyboards, chairs and other work tools may be shared by more than a dozen people in the same day, making the potential for spreading communicable illnesses far greater than in a normal office environment.

Our workforce is also aging and in general, older controllers are less healthy than younger ones. Years of working air traffic takes a physical toll on the individual and a general degradation of health is, unfortunately, to be expected. In a recent study released by Cornell University, researchers concluded that lost productivity due to "presenteeism" – the failure of ill employees who report to work to maintain productivity standards – costs employers far more than absenteeism, for the simple reason that "sick employees can't concentrate, work more slowly and clog up the productivity process." Apart from the fact that nobody wants our system – the most productive in the world – to fall behind, we also don't want to imagine the potentially catastrophic effects of sick controllers on the job who are unable to focus and do their jobs properly.

Training

A month ago, at NATCA's annual Lobby Week luncheon, Administrator Blakey raised the issue of controllers paying for a portion of their training. The truth is that under the Collegiate Training Initiative, many potential controllers are already investing in a college degree based program to build their skills and eligibility for this profession. While ideally this program should help to reduce training time, the FAA has hired too few controllers in the past several years to do a valid analysis of the success rate.

While the schools, like Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Missle State Tennessee University, Purdue University and the Universities of North Dakota and Alaska have invested millions of dollars to develop programs that meet FAA standards, the slow pace of hiring has made it difficult for them to attract and retain students. As you know Mr. Chairman, Embry-Riddle, one of the largest of the training schools, is located in your district. In fact, nine of the fourteen FAA-approved training schools—are situated in or near the districts of subcommittee members.

As I stated earlier, the current rules only allow graduates to remain on the FAA eligibility list for two years and some well qualified prospective controllers will be rendered ineligible simply because the FAA lacks the funds to fill the positions. Extending the eligibility of these students is a positive step but we should also be working to move these individuals from the list of eligible new hires onto the training roles. What we need to do now is attract people, not drive them away.

The recent Inspector General's report provided some useful data and insight into the issues, and I have elaborated on his chart below:

Training Statistics Provided by 17 Facilities (Fys 2002 and 2003)

Facility	Facility Level	Training Failures	Number of Newly Certified Controllers	Average Years to Certify as a Controller*	Average Hours of Training on Live Traffic*	Failure Rate
Atlanta Center	12	11	36	2.1	666	23.40%
Chicago Center	12	5	28	3.5	905	15.15%
Cleveland Center	12	2	26	2.7	677	7.14%
Jacksonville Center	11	1	28	1.5	402	3.45%
Los Angeles Center	11	20	26	2.5	847	43.48%
Minneapolis Center	11	1	22	1.3	434	4.35%
New York Center	12	15	31	3.8	696	32.61%
Oakland Center	11	6	14	3.4	655	30.00%
Washington Center	12	4	12	2.0	492	25.00%
Total (Center)		**65**	**223**	**2.5**	**641.56**	**22.57%**
Atlanta TRACON	12	18	3	Excluded because of recent consolidation	Excluded because of recent consolidation	85.71%
Chicago TRACON	12	14	3	1.8	462	82.35%
Minneapolis TRACON	11	1	12	1.7	721	7.69%
New York TRACON	12	35	16	1.7	Average data not available. Data available by individual	68.63%
Southern California TRACON	12	3	8	1.0	299	27.27%
Total (TRACON)		**71**	**42**	**1.6**	**494**	**62.83%**
LaGuardia Tower	10	0	2	1.8	291	0.00%
Los Angeles Tower	12	1	8	1.3	425	11.11%
Minneapolis Tower	11	1	5	0.6	316	16.67%

Total (Tower)		**2**	**15**	**1.2**	**344**	**11.76%**

*statistics are for CPCs that certified during Fys 2002 and 2003 and do not include data from training failures or developmentals who have not certified.

While the Inspector General's data and analysis is useful, a deeper picture is needed if we are to provide a more useful analysis. For example, the Inspector General points out that New York Center had 15 training failures while the Washington Center had only 4, leading the reader to conclude that ZDC and ZNY are comparable, but that there is some disparity in their training outcomes. However, if we look at the failure rate, ZDC has a rate of 25%, while ZNY's rate is 32.6%. While this is significantly higher, it is far from exponentially higher as the raw figures may lead one to conclude. Moreover, ZNY is an Oceanic Center. The Oceanic option requires additional training beyond that at a facility where no Oceanic (procedural) air traffic control services are provided. One would logically conclude that this additional requirement would lead to an increase in both training time and failure rate. When compared to the statistics from Oakland Center, another Oceanic facility, we see both the average training time and failure rate are comparable:

Facility	Facility Level	Training Failures	Number of Newly Certified Controllers	Average Years to Certify as a Controller*	Average Hours of Training on Live Traffic*	Failure Rate
New York Center	12	15	31	3.8	696	32.61%
Oakland Center	11	6	14	3.4	655	30.00%

New York Center's numbers are only marginally higher, however it is also a higher ranked facility (ATC 12 vs. ATC 11) based on the volume and complexity of traffic.

What does all of this mean? Quite simply, that there are no easy answers. There are many differences between facilities and types of facilities that must be considered. The one thing that the Inspector General concludes in this report, and NATCA knows to be true, is that transfer controllers certify faster than do external new hires.

The FAA has a clear opportunity to take advantage of this fact and reduce training time. Given that the system as a whole is short staffed, we know the largest shortages as well as the highest rates of retirement will occur at the busiest facilities. And we know that these facilities have the greatest impact on the National Air System as a whole. The conclusion is simple – the FAA should begin to aggressively fill vacancies at high level facilities with existing air traffic controller personnel, even if that will create temporary shortages at the lower activity facilities, because it is at these facilities where external new hires will have the greatest chance of success and will require shorter training time.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, we cannot and must not take the fact that our nation has the safest, most efficient air traffic control system in the world for granted. It must be a critical ongoing goal. While controllers will continue to do everything we can to uphold this gold standard, our skies are only as safe as the number of eyes who are watching it. The reality is that we are facing a very serious staffing crisis. And we need to start training now – in fact, we needed to start training yesterday – to make sure we have enough controllers to do the job right. Our training is difficult – and not everyone makes the cut. And that's the way it should be. But if we don't start introducing more controllers into the system, delays, congestion and even worse will result. And that's not a resolution that any of us want to see.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this distinguished Committee. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.